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SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR JWOOD  
OSD FOR MCCRAW  
CG CJTF-101, POLAD, JICCENT

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: IEC SCRAMBLING TOWARDS VOTER REGISTRATION OPENING  
DAY

REF: A. KABUL 2551  
[1](#)B. KABUL 2387

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Two weeks before the first phase of voter registration opens on October 6 in 14 provinces, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) is scrambling. Its field operations are up and running but hobbled by the still slow delivery of key equipment and supplies in some areas, including generators, vehicles, IT equipment, furniture and registration forms. The voter education and outreach program, which includes a media campaign, as well as individual programs designed by local civic educators, mosque sermons, SMS messaging and small grants to NGOs, begins September 21. Security planning is underway but slow. ISAF, however, has made it clear it is prepared to do whatever is necessary to support the police on voter registration security. The IEC and security agencies will test their emergency response capabilities September 24.

IEC FIELD OPERATIONS MAKING DO

[1](#)2. (SBU) As noted in Ref A, Provincial Electoral Officers (PEOs) in the Phase I provinces are recruiting staff, coordinating with local security forces, and organizing for voter outreach. The challenges enumerated by Logar PEO Fazly are typical: low pay and uncertain security slows staff recruitment, limited transportation decreases election workers' efficiency, inadequate office space and equipment limits progress and makes communication with IEC headquarters more difficult. In Logar, Wardak, Nuristan, Kunar, and Ghazni some IEC officials have received threats and "night letters" and, as a result, some staff have resigned in Logar, Wardak, and Ghazni. The IEC is not sure how it will fill these gaps. Civic education and mobile registration teams appear particularly vulnerable to future security threats; they will travel in unmarked vehicles without security escorts and, if threatened, are instructed to contact the local police.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In Bamyān, Ghazni, Kapisa, and Parwan, the PEOs are making last minute adjustments to site locations, affecting the operational and security plans. UNDP on September 18 requested Afghan National Army (ANA) and ISAF air lift to Ghowr and Dai-Kundi provinces to ensure delivery of key materials in time for Phase I registration on October 6. The UN continues to fill its technical advisor positions; this is

a gradual process as there is a limited pool of qualified personnel. In fact, the UN is experiencing a steadily building sense of urgency as it works to address challenges posed by organizational and operational bureaucracy, compressed timelines, recruitment of staff, and IEC delays in decision-making. Nonetheless, the UN remains confident it can successfully navigate these obstacles to keep the overall process on track.

#### PUBLIC OUTREACH STARTS SEPT 21

¶4. (SBU) The IEC has trained some 1,500 local civic educators, who will begin to meet with voters in small groups and at community events beginning September 21, two weeks before Phase I registration opens. On the same date, the IEC will launch its diverse media campaign, which will use mobile phone SMS messaging, a call-in hot line, documentaries, interviews, television, radio, newspapers, and billboards. The wildly popular Afghan Olympic Tae Kwon Do champion, Rohullah Nikpai, features prominently in the campaign, including billboard, TV and radio spots. Separate campaigns target youth, women, disabled persons and the homebound. The IEC will reach out to voters who already possess a card as well, using the slogans "Found it!" and "I have it!" to discourage such voters from trying to re-register.

#### SECURITY PLANS ALMOST COMPLETE

¶5. (SBU) The regional police, army, and ISAF commands will present their security plans to the combined commanders beginning September 20 and ending October 13, leaving scant

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margin for error or adjustment. (Additionally, there is no current plan for RC-West or 205th Corps to conduct brief backs; Ghowr is in RC-West and is in Phase I of voter registration.) The IEC and the security agencies will jointly test their emergency response capabilities in a headquarters exercise on September 24. The police appear to be using the urgency to launch on voter registration security to angle for additional communications equipment. Police training for voter registration will be limited to a still-pending draft code-of-conduct manual. As reported Ref B, the ANA is underenthusiastic about its role in voter registration security responsibilities. COMISAF has made it clear that ISAF is prepared to do whatever is necessary to support the Afghan Ministry of the Interior as the lead in Voter Registration Security.

#### WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

¶6. (SBU) The measure of success for this voter registration update process will not be a statistic - a certain, magic number of new voters added to rolls. There will be mistakes, imperfections, and perhaps some irregularities. The IEC expects that, at least in the beginning, its centers will enroll a relatively low number of new registrants, as people are pre-occupied with more immediate concerns like unemployment and security than a still-distant election day. Data on the number of voters who need to register is extremely shaky, and the IEC is working with rough estimates. If registration does prove slow, the IEC will leave the district centers open 30 days longer after each phase, or reopen registration in provincial capitals two months prior to election day.

¶7. (SBU) There will also be continued security threats, and there may be some violence. The IEC's resolve is firm (Ref B.) Against stiff odds, the measure of success will be how ordinary the process can be - that after years of war and amid an ongoing struggle for peace, Afghan citizens can queue up, fill in a form, and have a say in their future.

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